

# Coping with a Talent Shortage and Talent War in Cell and Gene Therapy

Cyrill Kellerhals and Sarah O'Reilly, Andelyn Biosciences

Andelyn Biosciences is building the best cell and gene therapy team in spite of a talent shortage and competitive talent war – by meeting candidates where they are, offering a comprehensive training program, partnering with local universities, and demonstrating why interfacing with patients makes the difference for recruits. Cyrill Kellerhals, Head of Manufacturing, and Sarah O'Reilly, Senior Director, Human Resources, discuss Andelyn's unique solutions to the sector's ubiquitous challenge of finding and retaining talent from a limited pool, with *Pharma's Almanac* Editor in Chief David Alvaro.

**David Alvaro (DA):** Given the true growth phase that Andelyn Biosciences is presently in, what is the range of different roles that the company is looking to fill?

**SARAH O'REILLY (SO):** We're really looking for a broad range of people at the moment. Some of these scientist-based roles that we are recruiting for require little to no experience – we will train hires along the way. However, we do look for most of those candidates to still have their degree, which is why we strategically partner with local universities to create connections and try to tap into that talent upon graduation. We then put all of our hires through our own specific gene therapy training that we developed in conjunction with the local university.

We also have a need for people with very

specific experience around a certain type of qualification, which is where we're actively looking for candidates. In this space, it's less about trying to attract talent and more about bringing them to us and proving why we're the best option.

In terms of talent pool, anyone with general background or experience in gene therapy is considered more attractive in the space we are in due to the specialized nature of our work. We simply have to be competitive in acquiring talent because the market is heightened.

**DA:** Are there any particular specializations where the need is most acute?

**CYRILL KELLERHALS (CK):** It's across the board, though we have the most need for a

couple of types of candidates – generally people with a lot of relevant experience and potentially a Ph.D. in a specific field. Likewise, detail-oriented critical thinkers are needed to produce our products in large quantities on the manufacturing side. Although it's quite a challenge, Andelyn has been quite successful in attracting talent.

**DA:** What are the primary strategies Andelyn has for recruitment?

**SO:** There are three different areas on which we're focusing our talent strategy when it comes to attraction and retention. Primarily, we are dedicated to continuing to be an employer of choice by addressing things that matter to our employees and creating a culture that people want to be in. Our secondary push is finding talent and building awareness of Andelyn, as Columbus, Ohio hasn't historically been a first choice for this industry, and many people are still learning who we are. The third prong is building our own pipeline, which is largely taking place through our partnerships with local universities. We participate in speaking engagements, attend career fairs and other events, and advertise around the campus. In particular, we have a close relationship with Columbus State.

Columbus State has worked with us to design gene therapy-specific onboarding material that all of our new hires go through, not only our scientists. We share this curriculum with everyone, because gene therapy is so

niche and requires constant education. From that point, these new hires undergo additional specific department training.

We plan to continue our partnerships with Columbus State and eventually expand to some of their preferred pathway four-year partners. Through these partnerships, we hope to build out certificate programs, associate programs, and even bachelors programs with a focus on gene therapy. Our goal is to create education programs that would directly feed into our organization with all candidates having the background we need and build this skillset in central Ohio.

The industry's overall interest in central Ohio is certainly bringing more awareness to the city and thus more attention to available job opportunities. It's also driving the local universities – they're so willing to respond to better prepare their students to work in our field.

**DA:** Has the experience of the pandemic and the increase in remote work changed how wide a net you cast for certain roles?

**CK:** Five or 10 years ago, there was an overall talent war in the industry that centered on the location of the company. I remember when I worked for a previous company and we would go to happy hour – the HR business partner from competitors would be across the table. It was so competitive that you could walk away with a new job that evening.

COVID has completely altered this whole situation and accelerated several paradigm shifts. The first is remote work, which is a key driver today. Second, I believe that COVID created a new understanding of what life is about and prompted many to pause their traditional career trajectories. While the talent pool has grown, because you can work from anywhere, it has simultaneously shrunk because many people are making different choices.

**SO:** I agree; the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many things. It's a little difficult for us at Andelyn to compare things before and after the pandemic, simply because our organization grew so much and began to truly solidify during the pandemic. When we compare today to before the pandemic, we're actually comparing when we were a part of Nationwide Children's Hospital versus where we are today, as Andelyn Biosciences. Many things are different; however, one thing that we realized, like so many other companies, is that we are able to offer a hybrid or remote

options for certain positions for which it may not be necessary to be on-site all the time to work effectively.

As we started to plan for the longer term, we surveyed our employees in late spring and asked them questions, such as: Is this working? Do you feel like you're still getting the support you need? Is there sufficient collaboration? What resources are you missing? We were surprised that the consensus was that things were working well. We did not see a decrease in efficiency. We haven't seen reductions in collaboration, so we decided to offer flexible work options as a long-term option. This allows us to expand that talent pool and target specific expertise regardless of working location.

**DA:** Cyrill, I'd imagine that's the situation is somewhat different for manufacturing, right?

**CK:** Yes, remote work is simply not a possibility for most manufacturing roles. For the QA team, there's a 50/50 split between on-site and remote work, but the manufacturing associates have to be on-site. However, COVID helped us realize that, if a role essentially involves paper-based activities, that person can work from home instead of sitting at a desk in the facility. This allows us to be more flexible, which is a win-win for both the companies and our recruits. Our employees save time and enjoy a better work-life balance integration. That is to say, when we can give a remote work option, we will allow it, but, for the operational folks, it's a little more complicated by necessity.

**DA:** I would imagine that, in addition to a pipeline for new talent, there are roles you need to fill that require a certain amount of specific experience. As there's an explosion of companies growing right now, there must be significant competition for that top talent. Can you tell me how Andelyn works to stay competitive in recruiting those experienced people who likely have a range of options?

**CK:** Let me begin with explaining why I picked Andelyn, which goes back to the original mission statement of the company. The name "Andelyn" is a combination of the names of two of our early patients – Andrew and Evelyn – and the name itself is reflective of the patient-centric ethos that makes Andelyn so attractive. The reason I chose the company is in line with why over half of my staff has too – we're working for Andelyn because we support the company's goals and want to advance therapies to help save

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lives. Everything else – salary and the other perks – are similar across the industry, but the vision and mission statement of Andelyn stands out.

**SO:** We do a lot of benchmarking to make sure that we're staying competitive – we're always looking for ways we can differentiate ourselves as an employer – but we stand out the most because of the culture we offer our prospective employees. Through our history of originating out of Nationwide Children's Hospital, we have a truly unique legacy and experience. Our team includes people that have been in this industry for a very long time, which provides a tremendous foundation for Andelyn's continuing growth. Everybody's heart is in the right place, and they truly believe in the mission we strive for as a company.

**CK:** We had the opportunity to have both Andrew and Evelyn (our namesake patients) on-site very recently, and seeing two of our first patients who benefited from what we do every day reinforces the reason why we come to work each day. If you need to know what you're doing and what the purpose is, I think that what Andelyn presents is really the gold standard. When I worked for Novartis or CSL, we had some patients coming in or we would hear a story, but to have the person on-site and have their names embedded into the company takes that sense of mission to the next level.

**DA:** How do you encourage further professional growth and retain key talent?

**CK:** Retention couldn't be more important in this talent war. We're creating a path for our employees to grow internally, for example,

by moving operational associates into Quality or Supply Chain roles. We sit down and listen to our associates and ask how we can help them to grow even further and what can be reinforced and strengthened. We view recruitment as an ongoing process, which is why we actively engage with the associates.

**SO:** Absolutely. It starts with our employees continuing to develop that culture, listening to them and addressing their issues, and providing those growth opportunities – this leads to employees telling their friends about Andelyn, being champions for us, and promoting us as a company. This chain of events continues to drive the culture we're seeking and gives us even more that we're able to share with potential candidates down the road. As much as we focus externally on getting that talent in the door; we're trying to keep as much attention, if not more, on our internal population to make sure this is the kind of environment where people want to work and grow over time.

**DA:** To what extent has the company retained the teams going back to that original small core at Nationwide Children's Hospital that eventually became Andelyn?

**SO:** A good chunk of that population is still here, and they are truly the core of Andelyn, because their pioneering work brought us to where we are today. In Andelyn's infancy as an organization at Nationwide Children's Hospital, there was no sales team; the team had to rely on word of mouth to find new opportunities. This was accomplished by developing and manufacturing quality products and building solid relationships with clients that then referred us to new prospects, the business continued to grow, which is a tremendous foundation that we've built. Ultimately, we don't want to lose ourselves. We want to make sure that we're staying true to our roots and not losing sight of the reason why we do our work, and the presence of that original team and that legacy help tremendously.

**DA:** How have your own career paths helped you to deal with the challenges of growing the company?

**CK:** As a manager, you have to encourage people to step out of their comfort zone and also understand they will make mistakes and even fail, but you shouldn't punish them. I encourage them to grow and reinforce that the sky is the limit.

**SO:** I believe that my combination of experience, operating in a large organization and dealing with strategy and metrics, while also understanding a small organization, prepared me for the world I'm in today and is relevant, especially as we build up Andelyn at a rapid pace.

**DA:** Sarah, from the point of view of human resources, how does the work needed to support this continuous expansion differ from what is needed to maintain an existing workforce?

**SO:** It is a balancing act. There are both similarities and differences when discussing the work to expand and retain talent simultaneously. The similarities fall within communicating and maintaining our culture and our roots that we discussed earlier. To be successful as an organization in both retaining and attracting employees, you must focus on who you are as a company and never lose sight of that vision and mission – but continue to perpetuate that messaging so you gain momentum in both areas, especially as we are building our brand. As for the differences in work – both are tremendously important. We really need to put in the time and effort to hear and focus on our current employees and ensure that they have a positive experience with Andelyn. This is a continuous effort of actively listening, action planning and implementation – our employees are the key to our success. When talking about our expansion efforts, there is a heightened focus on brand awareness – simply put, Andelyn is new. We were part of

Nationwide Children's Hospital for 15 years and are now establishing ourselves under a new name. The work that goes into that is promoting ourselves in as many avenues as possible to get our name and brand out to the workforce – we want to proactively recruit and gain excitement around our incredible organization.

**DA:** Cyrill, has your experience with building the manufacturing team, not to mention the operations themselves, been similar?

**CK:** Yes. Besides the vision/mission statement, this was the other reason why I was attracted to Andelyn – the opportunity to really build something special. Big Pharma is normally driven by numbers, whether those are budgets or headcounts – it's a battle for everything. The thought process is, how can we outsource more and make things cheaper and faster? Andelyn takes the opposite approach and is focused on building and growing from a team, a system, and a product perspective.

Another driver for myself and for several other key members is expanding into the new facility, which is being built in proximity to the Ohio State campus. I'm waiting for the moment the building is complete, when we can fully reflect on what was accomplished as a team – the learning experience is unbelievable. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be able to build a facility at this scale, which is 185,000-ft<sup>2</sup> large and a \$175 million investment. This building is an opportunity to accelerate our vision/mission statement even further. ●

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Cyrill Kellerhals**, Head of Manufacturing, Andelyn Biosciences

Cyrill has nearly 20 years of quality and manufacturing leadership experience across Asia, Europe, and North America in the pharmaceutical, biopharmaceutical, and medical device industries. Prior to joining Andelyn, he held positions of increasing responsibility at CSL Behring and Novartis.

**LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com/in/cyrill-kellerhals-82a73152](https://www.linkedin.com/in/cyrill-kellerhals-82a73152)



**Sarah O'Reilly**, Senior Human Resource Director, Andelyn Biosciences

Sarah has a broad range of experience across human resource functions, including recruiting, coaching, performance management, and project management, and has a proven track record of developing human resource plans aligned with business requirements. She came to Andelyn from Honda of America, Manufacturing, where she focused on human resource business plans and strategy, as well as leading the compensation, succession planning, performance management, and human resource analytics teams.

**LinkedIn:** [www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-o-reilly-29661913](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-o-reilly-29661913)